

Washington State Patrol Media Release

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State Patrol Accepts All Findings in Audits of State Toxicology Lab

The Washington State Patrol announced today that it has accepted the findings of three separate audits of the State Toxicology Lab, and has begun implementing all of the auditors' recommendations.

Two of the auditors made a total of 39 recommendations for process changes in the Tox Lab. Twenty-three have already been implemented and most of the rest are expected to be completed by mid-2008.

A third audit team looked at specific testing errors, which were few in number, and recommended ways to prevent those from being repeated.

"Our goal is to make a good laboratory better," said WSP Chief John R. Batiste. "We appreciate the work of the auditors, and the thoughtful recommendations they made. These are solutions that are doable in the real world and we can implement them."

The Governor has included in her 2008 budget the funding for limited additional staff to ensure accountability.

The audits were begun last year, after errors in documentation were discovered in connection with solutions used in breath testing machines. The end result was a complete top-to-bottom review of everything the lab does.

"We will not stop with just these audits," Batiste added. "We will continue to look for ways to improve our processes, and improve the product that we provide to the criminal justice system."

The auditors' recommendations for process improvements fell into two general categories:

- Handling of evidence. Samples stored at the toxicology lab will now be handled in the same way that all other evidence is handled by the State Patrol. Only Property and Evidence Custodians (PECs) will have direct access to storage areas. Scientists performing lab tests will sign out samples, and sign them back in when testing is complete.

- Recording of test results and appropriate peer review to assure accuracy in recording. Errors in recording were far more common than actual errors in testing.

The third audit team reviewed about 300 cases. They found ten errors, none of which made a material difference in a case. Several were cases in which the actual test was done correctly, but the result was expressed in the wrong units. In lay terms, it would be like measuring your driveway, but then mistakenly expressing the distance in yards rather than feet. Additional peer review and changes in some computer defaults are expected to resolve those issues.

Weekly training for lab employees has been instituted, to assure they are aware of the latest procedures to be followed.

The State Forensic Investigation Council is now conducting a review of the audits. Appointed by the Governor, the Council has jurisdiction over the Lab. The FIC may conduct a field audit of its own as well.

Additionally, the American Society of Crime Lab Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Bureau (ASCLD/LAB) will institute an accreditation process for breath test programs later this year. WSP intends to apply for accreditation as soon as ASCLD/LAB begins accepting applications.

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